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LITTLE COMEDIES

"This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorne brake our tyring house."

"Like cutler's poetry
Upon a knife, *Love me and leave me not*"

LITTLE COMEDIES

43622

BY

JULIAN STURGIS

AUTHOR OF 'JOHN-A-DREAMS'

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
APPLES,	1
FIRE-FLIES,	43
PICKING UP THE PIECES,	67
HALF-WAY TO ARCADY,	103
MABEL'S HOLY DAY,	117
HEATHER,	141

APPLES

APPLES.

It is spring-time in Rome, and one of the first hot days. In the veiled light of his studio CLAUD HUNTLEY *is painting* LADY ROEDALE'S *picture. He likes to talk as he works.*

Claud. Then why did you offer to sit to me?

Lady Roedale. Why? Why? It's too hot to give reasons. Perhaps because your studio is the coolest place in Rome. Or shall I merely say that I sit to you because I choose?

Cl. That's better. You always did what you chose. And now you are free. You delight in your liberty.

Lady R. "Delight" is a strong word. It is suggestive of violent emotion. I detest violence.

Cl. You say with Hamlet, "Man delights me not."

Lady R. I say nothing with Hamlet. Heaven defend me from such presumption! and besides, Hamlet was a bore, and thought too much of himself.

Cl. Heaven defend you from presumption! But any way you agree. You don't like man, and you do like liberty?

Lady R. I prefer liberty of the two. A widow can do what she pleases, and, and this is far better, she need not do anything which bores her.

Cl. Ah, there you are wrong. Your liberty is a sham. You are bound by a thousand silk threads of society. Your conduct is modified by the criticism of a dozen tea-tables. Trippet takes your cup, and sees that your eyes are red. By the way they are red——.

Lady R. Thank you. If I am looking frightful, we had better postpone the sitting.

Cl. Your eyes are red: off runs Trippet with the news. Lady Roedale has been crying. Why? Why! of course because the Marchese has left Rome—says Trippet.

Lady R. Does he? Trippet is odious, and so is the Marchese, a Narcissus stuffed and dyed, who has been in love with himself for seventy years. You are all insufferable, all you men.

Cl. I beg your pardon.

Lady R. Oh, don't. If you were not so delightfully rude, I should go to sleep. I used to have a snappish little dog, such a dear, that barked when I dozed. He was very good for me—but he died.

Cl. And when I die, I should recommend a parrot.

Lady R. A parrot! A very good idea. A parrot to say, "Wake up, my lady." Will you get him for me?

Cl. I shall be dead. He is to replace me, you know.

Lady R. No; I shouldn't like that. I like you best, after all.

Cl. That is very kind of you. I believe you do like me, when you remember my existence.

Lady R. You wouldn't have me think of you all day. A man always about is insufferable.

Cl. Everything is insufferable or odious to-day.

Lady R. Do you think so?

Cl. I mean that you think so.

Lady R. How can you know what I think? I am sure I don't know what I think. It is so hot. I ought not to have sat to-day, but after all, as I said, your studio is the coolest place in Rome.

Cl. My room is better than my company.

Lady R. I hate jokes in hot weather. They remind me of "laughter holding both his sides," and "tables in a roar," and all sorts of violent things.

Cl. It's no good. I can't get on. You look so lazy and indifferent. I hate that expression.

Lady R. I am sorry that my appearance is repulsive.

Cl. I wish it were. But no matter. We were saying—what were we saying? Oh, I remember. You were saying that you could not bear to have a man always about the house.

Lady R. I have been married.

Cl. How can you bear to talk of that?

Lady R. I don't know. (*She yawns and stretches out her arms lazily.*) I am free now.

Cl. Are you so in love with freedom?

Lady R. In love! I don't like the expression. "In love" is a vile phrase.

Cl. And you think yourself free. Did not I tell you that you can't move hand or foot without being talked about; that you can't buy a bonnet without being married to some fool; that you can't pass a club window without setting flippant tongues wagging, nor stay at home without tea-

drinking dowagers finding the reason? didn't I tell you——

Lady R. Yes, you did.

Cl. I wish I had the right to stop their tongues.

Lady R. You are a very old friend.

Cl. That's not enough.

Lady R. How hot it is!

Cl. Very. Will you be so kind as to turn your head a little more to the left?

Lady R. Oh dear, how cross you are! and you ought to be so happy. You are not like me. You have something to do. You can stand all day and smudge on colour.

Cl. A nice occupation—smudging on colour.

Lady R. One can't select one's words in hot weather. I wish I could smudge.

Cl. You can sit for pictures.

Lady R. A fine occupation. To be perched on a platform, with a stiff neck, and a cross painter, a Heine without poetry. I believe that you are

only painting my gown. I shall stay at home to-morrow, and send my gown.

Cl. Your gown will be less cruel. (*He puts down his painting tools.*) Why do you play with me like this?

Lady R. Play? I was not aware I was doing anything so amusing.

Cl. It must end some day.

Lady R. Everything ends—even the hot weather.

Cl. Clara!

Lady R. Now, please, don't quarrel. We have always been good friends, you and I.

Cl. Friends! Yes.

Lady R. Do let well alone.

Cl. Very well. As you please. The head a little more up. Thanks. (*He takes up his painting tools.*) You don't look well.

Lady R. I am sorry that I look ugly.

Cl. You don't look ugly. How irritating you are!

Lady R. I am sorry that I am so disagreeable.

Cl. Oh! I shall spoil this picture. Perhaps it will be more like the original.

Lady R. Spoiled! Oh, Claud, I do wish you wouldn't be funny till the weather is cooler. It's almost vulgar. Besides, I am not spoiled, not in the least. I am generally slighted. No woman was ever so neglected. I am not fast enough to be a success. But to be fast in this heat! Oh dear me! it's tiresome enough to be slow.

Cl. I am glad that you are no faster—not that it is any business of mine, as you were about to say. The chin a little more up. Thank you.

Lady R. How kind of you to talk for me! It saves me so much trouble. Go on; say what else I am about to say. You amuse me.

Cl. I am glad to do what I can for you. I will talk for you, walk for you, fetch and carry for you, live for you, die for you, and so——

Lady R. Mocker! Heine!

Cl. "Without the poetry!" As you please. Take it as mockery.

Lady R. All romance is mockery. Romance is as much out of date as good manners.

Cl. Was I rude again? I beg your pardon.

Lady R. Only fashionably uncivil. It's quite the thing. The best men talk of women as if they were horses.

Cl. And women treat men as if they were donkeys.

Lady R. Oh dear me, how quick you are! I wish I was quick, and modern, and jolly. I wish I was a jolly good fellow, with the last clown-gag. "You'll get yourself disliked, my boy;" "How ah yah, Sportsman?" How popular I should be! But I can't do it naturally. I am not to the manner born. I am *bourgeoise.* Good heavens! Perhaps I am genteel.

Cl. I thought I was to do your talking for you. As if any woman could be silent for ten minutes!

Lady R. Do you think I wish to talk? I am not equal to the exertion. Time me then.

I won't speak a word for ten — no, for five minutes.

Cl. Keep your head up, please. Thank you.

Lady R. "How are you to-morrow?" I never could see the humour of that.

Cl. Just half a minute.

Lady R. Don't be ridiculous. Ah me! I shall never be a success.

Cl. A success! What do you want? to be stared at by every booby at the opera—to have a dozen fools smiling and looking conscious when your name is mentioned—to hear your sayings repeated, and lies told about you, and your gowns described, and your movements chronicled?

Lady R. It is my dream.

Cl. All women are alike—all women, except one perhaps.

Lady R. "Except one!" Who? who? Oh, Claud, do tell me!

Cl. That's better. Now you look awake.

Keep that expression. Ah! now you've lost it again.

Lady R. You horrid man, tell me at once. Who is it? Oh, Claud, do tell me, please!

Cl. It's nothing. I spoke without thinking.

Lady R. Then you meant what you said. I don't care for things which men say after thinking. Then they deceive us, poor simple women that we are!

Cl. Simple! There was never a simple woman since Eve. The best women manage us for our good—the worst for our ill. The ends are different, but the means the same.

Lady R. Was the one woman—the exceptional woman—the paragon—was she not simple?

Cl. On my soul I think so. *She* was not bent on success—success in society. Yes, she was simple.

Lady R. So is bread and butter.

Cl. And she was clever too. The innocence of a child and the wit of a woman, with a sweet

wholesome humour—not a compound of sham epigram and rude repartee.

Lady R. I know, I know. A man's woman! a man's woman! With a pet lamb frisking before her, and an adoring mastiff at her heels; childlike gaiety in her step and frolic fun; a gown of crisp white muslin; an innocent sash; the hair plain, quite plain; and the nose a little reddened by cold water. Oh, how I should like to see her!

Cl. You are not likely to be gratified. She is buried, as you would say, in the country.

Lady R. Do the Tyrrels never leave Limeshire?

Cl. The Tyrrels! How do you know? Why should you think I was talking of them? Have they a daughter?

Lady R. Have they a daughter! When men try diplomacy how they overdo it! Have they a daughter! Claud, Claud, how strange that you should not know that the Tyrrels have a daughter, when you spent a whole summer at the Tyrrels'

place, from the very beginning of May to the very end of September, and the girl was at home during the whole of your visit!

Cl. How do you know that?

Lady R. Do you think that there is one of your numerous lady friends who does not know the history of all your love affairs?

Cl. Perhaps you will favour me with this history. It will probably be entirely new to me.

Lady R. I will try. But it is hard to remember in this hot weather. Now, attend. The scene is laid at Lindenhurst, an ancient house in Limeshire. There dwell the living representatives of the family of Tyrrel, older than the house; and thither came in early spring a painter bent on sketching—a sort of Lord of Burleigh—a Heinrich Heine—a man not too young, a——who was the man who had seen many cities and things?

Cl. Odysseus. Ulysses.

Lady R. And who was the girl who played ball? The *ingénue?*

Cl. That Nausicaa should be called an *ingénue!*

Lady R. Ulysses, who had been in many societies and seen all sorts of people, was rather tired of it all, and growing a little snappish and cross. So he sketched because he had nothing better to do, and he looked at Nausicaa for the same reason: and so, by degrees, he found himself soothed and refreshed by the girl's artlessness, or apparent artlessness.

Cl. Apparent!

Lady R. She was such a contrast to the weary women of the world. She was so ingenuous, oh, so ingenuous! When he went to sketch, she went with him, as a matter of course; and she showed him her favourite bits; and he made a thousand pretty pictures of cows and pigs and dandelions, and, above all, of the old orchard, full of apple-trees. He developed a passion for painting apple-trees in every stage, from blossom

to fruit. And the country seemed very countrified, and the green refreshingly green, and the cows nice and milky, and the pigs unconventional, and the dandelions a great deal finer than camellias, and everything lazy and industrious and delightful. And so the jaded man was very much pleased by the novelty.

Cl. A very pretty story. Pray go on. Your expression is almost animated, and this picture is coming a little better.

Lady R. Then came the reaction.

Cl. That's not so lively. There! Now you have altered your face entirely.

Lady R. The novelty ceased to be a novelty. Old Tyrrel grew grumpy. Mamma had always thought the child might do better if she had a season in London. And then my lord Ulysses got disgusted, and the curtain fell—and so the idyl ended. There, I have told you how the country miss set her rustic cap at the man of the world, and set it in vain.

Cl. She was utterly incapable of setting her cap at anybody.

Lady R. Who? Miss Lottie—Tottie—Nelly —Milly—What's-her-name?

Cl. Betty. Miss Tyrrel.

Lady R. Then I have succeeded in recalling her to your mind? The Tyrrels *have* a daughter.

Cl. Go on, if it amuses you.

Lady R. It does amuse me a little. Now it is for you to take up the story. Why did you go away and leave this Arcadia and Miss Nausicaa?

Cl. Because I was afraid of loving her. That is the truth, since you will know it. And now let us drop it. It is as much a thing of the past as the Pyramids. I want to talk of the present —of you, Clara, if I may.

Lady R. Things of the past are so seldom past. The Pyramids are about still. I must know why you were afraid of loving this girl.

Cl. What is the use of talking about that?

Lady R. It's as bad as suppressing the third volume of one's novel. If you don't tell me I shall go away.

Cl. Why should I mind telling you? It's a tale of the dark ages long ago. Keep your head a little more to the left.

Lady R. But I want to look at you.

Cl. Deny yourself that pleasure if you can. Thanks.

Lady R. Well? Go on, do.

Cl. A nice fellow I was to win the love of a young girl.

Lady R. Why? You are not worse than most men.

Cl. Will you kindly keep your head turned to the left? Thanks. There was a girl with all the world about her sweet and bright and young, and a woman's life before her with promise of all good. There was I, a man who had outlived my illusions—who had found the world dusty, chokingly dusty. The apples were dust in my mouth. I

had tried most things, and failed in most things. My art was of less importance than my dinner. I could still dine, though I didn't eat fruit in the evening. Bah! The apples turned to dust between my teeth. Why should I link a young creature, fresh as a June rose, to a dry stick?

Lady R. They train roses so sometimes.

Cl. Misleading metaphor! I came away. It's all over, all well over, long ago. Why you insist on raking up this foolish matter, I can't imagine. Yes, I can. It is to turn the conversation. You know quite well what I wish to say to you, what I have made up my mind to say to you. We have known each other for a long time, Clara: we have always been friends: we have both outlived some illusions: I think we should get on well together. Clara, consult your own happiness and mine. What do you think?

Lady R. May I look round now?

Cl. Do be serious. Don't be provoking.

Lady R. And you think that two dry sticks

supporting each other is a more engaging spectacle than a rose trained on a prop?

Cl. Enough of tropes. I deserve a plain answer.

Lady R. Don't people strike sparks by rubbing two sticks together?

Cl. What are you talking about?

Lady R. How the sparks would fly! I suppose that I ought to be very grateful, Claud. I am not quite sure. It's not a magnificent offer. A banquet of lost illusions and Dead Sea fruit. What a pleasant household! "This is my husband, a gentleman who has outlived his illusions." —"Permit me to present you to my wife, a lady who has everything but a heart." Will you have an apple? We import them ourselves fresh from the Dead Sea. Fresh!

Cl. I wonder you don't find the weather too hot for comedy.

Lady R. Do you call that comedy? It seems to me dreary enough.

Cl. The thought of joining your lot to mine?

Lady R. My lot! I never was dignified by such a possession. I go on by chance, and so do you. We have run along very pleasantly side by side. Hadn't we better leave it like that? If we were linked together, like two shaky vans in a goods-train, which of us would go in front?

Cl. You've the most provoking passion for metaphor.

Lady R. And you are sure that you have quite got over your admiration for Miss Tyrrel?

Cl. Don't talk of that. I tell you it is as much over as youth. I shall never see her again.

Lady R. You think not?

Cl. I am sure. The Tyrrels never leave Lindenhurst.

Lady R. What should you say if I told you that they were in Rome,—let us say at the hotel opposite?

Cl. I should say that you were romancing. If I believed you I should leave Rome to-day.

Lady R. Then don't believe me. Couldn't you get me some ice?

Cl. I am afraid that my man is out.

Lady R. You said that you would fetch and carry for me.

Cl. Oh, you want to be rid of me! Very well, I'll go. I don't mind appearances.

Lady R. Why should you? Don't be long.

Cl. You mean it? Oh, very well, I'll go.

Lady R. Au revoir!

(*Hereupon* CLAUD *goes out and leaves* LADY ROEDALE *alone.*)

Lady R. She is in Rome, nevertheless, Mr Claud, this Miss Betty of the apple-orchard. Shall I tell him, or shall I not? I am so sleepy that I can't decide on anything. Do I want to marry Claud Huntley? Ugh! I don't know. I am too sleepy to think. How tiresome men are! Why won't they stay good friends instead of turning into bad lovers? The age of lovers is past.

Love is impossible in so enlightened a generation. I am bored and he is bored. We shall be twice as bored together. That's mathematics, or logic, or something. Now I daresay that Claud thinks I have sent him away that I may consider his proposal. As if it wasn't much too hot to consider anything. It would be easier to take him than to think about it. Dear old Claud! I am sure he pictures me at this moment striding up and down, twisting my handkerchief like the woman in the play, and muttering, "Oh Claud, Claud, why distract me thus? Oh cruel man, will you not leave me at peace?" Shall I say Yes or No? What would he say if he met Miss Betty? What would she say? I am very sleepy —very, very sleepy. He pictures me in an awful state of excitement and agitation. What must be, must. Apples turn to dust—cottage and crust. I'll let things drift. It doesn't matter much, not much. Oh Claud! oh cruel man! oh sleep! I'll take a nap just to spite him.

(*So she falls asleep, screened from the eyes of* MISS BETTY TYRREL, *who presently comes in, stepping lightly and quickly.*)

Betty. I saw him go out. He's sure not to come back yet. I am so frightened, and it is such fun. What's the good of being in Rome, if you don't do as the Romans do? He must have gone for his daily walk. He can't be back yet. And if he does come, why should I care? I shan't be frightened. He always said I was very cool. If he comes in, I shall drop him a curtsey, and say, "How do you do, Mr Huntley? I said I would look in on you some day, and here I am." And he will make me a bow, and—but probably he won't know me. He'll take me for a tourist lady visiting his studio, and wanting to buy pictures; and I shall say, "Yes, thank you, very nice; put up that, and that; and would you be so kind as to send them down to my carriage?—yes, and the little one in the corner too, please." Why, what

is it? Yes, it is, it is the old orchard, our orchard, our orchard in May, with all the bright new blossoms, as it was when he—— He used to say that it was like the foam of the sea at sunrise. I don't think he ever saw the sun rise. He was awfully lazy. How good of him to keep this near him—the orchard, and a little corner of the dear old house! Oh blossoms, blossoms, you are there now at home, and I wish I was there too, and had never come, out and grown wise and old in this horrid world! It was there that I saw him first, just there. He was following papa through the little gate with the broken hinge, and he bent his head under the blossoms. He looked so tall, and so tired. And yet he hadn't been doing anything. Men are very strange. The less they do, the more tired they are. Why, here's another picture of the orchard. How funny! It must be autumn, for the apples are all ripe. But who is the young man in the funny cap? And who are the three ladies? And why does he sit, when they are

standing? I can't make it out. Do they want the apple? If you please, sir, give it to the lady with the shield and spear. That other one is not nice, not nice, I am sure. I don't care much for that picture. Are there any more apple pictures? No; no. Yes, here's another. Adam and Eve, I think. Yes, here is one great glittering coil of the serpent. I don't like Eve. What a languid, fine-lady Eve! Who's face is this? How handsome! And this? And this one on the easel? Everywhere the same face, handsome, lazy, indifferent. No, no, no, he never would be happy with her. It's Eve's face. Wicked woman! Wicked woman!

Lady R. (*waking*). Did you call me? Ah, what a sweet air! The day is changed.

B. Oh, I beg your pardon.

Lady R. (*drowsily*). Are you real, or a dream?

B. I am real. No; I had better say that I am a dream and melt away.

Lady R. I was just dreaming of you, Miss Tyrrel.

B. Of me? You don't know me. How do you know—? I mean, you called me by some name, I think.

Lady R. Yes, Miss Innocence, I called you "Miss Tyrrel."

B. How can you know?

Lady R. I am a witch, for one thing; and for another, I saw your picture.

B. Has he got a picture of *me?*

Lady R. Of course, my dear.

B. And did he show it to *you?*

Lady R. No; I was looking about for curiosity's sake, and I saw it.

B. You are often here, then? Oh, I beg your pardon. I have no right to question you. But I don't know who you are.

Lady R. I am Lady Roedale; I am a widow; I am sitting for my picture; I am an old friend of Mr Huntley. Will that do?

B. A friend.

Lady R. A friend, my sweet Simplicity. And you? What brings you here?

B. Me? I—I am an old friend too.

Lady R. An old friend! Not quite old enough, I think.

B. Oh, Lady Roedale, I didn't think. I ought not to have come.

Lady R. It's very pretty and unconventional, my dear. Somebody said that you were so simple, that you didn't know what was conventional and what wasn't.

B. Oh, Lady Roedale, you know—you know that women are not like that.

Lady R. Yes, I know.

B. But I didn't think; I didn't stop to think, or I shouldn't have come. We are living just opposite, and I saw him go out, and all of a sudden I thought what fun it would be to see his studio when he was away, and that I could run back, and he would never know. But if I

had only known that you were here, I would have died sooner than come.

Lady R. It is better to live.

B. But you won't tell him? Promise me that you won't tell him. If you will only promise me, I will never come back, I will never see him again,—never, never.

Lady R. Don't be rash, my dear. You are safe now. You have run into the arms of a chaperon, a duenna, a gorgon. But if Mr Huntley is an old friend of yours, why didn't your father and mother come to see him too?

B. Because they are hurt. He went away so suddenly from home, and he never wrote, and they liked him so much, and they thought it unkind; but I know he never meant to be unkind, for he was always kind, and I know that he wouldn't be angry even at my coming here, and—and that's why.

Lady R. That's why, is it?

B. You don't think that I am very bad?

Lady R. My dear, you are much too good. I have no taste for bread and milk and book muslin; I don't like men's women; but I do like you.

B. Thank you, thank you. Now I see that he has not flattered you, not a bit. I thought at first that he had. He had his heart in his work when he did this.

Lady R. Shall I show you the work in which his heart is?

B. Yes.

(LADY ROEDALE *draws aside a curtain and shows a picture.*)

B. My picture!

Lady R. Yours.

B. Oh, let me go. If he should come and find me here. Oh, let me go, let me go.

Lady R. Too late. I hear him on the stairs.

B. What shall I do?

Lady R. Do as you are bid. Give me your

picture, quick! Now go behind the curtain, and be still.

(*She draws the curtain carefully.* CLAUD *enters, bringing ice.*)

Claud. I bring you ice, and something better. The heat is passing; the day is changed. Ah, the air smells wooingly here. See how I fetch and carry! Doesn't this convince you that I——

Lady R. (*studying the picture*). Yes, it is pretty.

Cl. Where did you get that?

Lady R. Don't be angry; I won't hurt it.

Cl. As you please. It's of no value—now.

Lady R. It is much better than mine. Indeed it has only one fault.

Cl. Indeed?

Lady R. It is awfully flattered.

Cl. How can you know, when you never saw the original?

Lady R. Ah, that is very true.

Cl. Put it down, please. I want to talk to you about—to go back to what we were saying, when——

Lady R. Shall I throw it down here?

Cl. Take care! What are you doing?

Lady R. I thought you said it was of no value?

Cl. It isn't. But then we are vain, you know, we artists; we don't like to see our work, even our bad work, destroyed.

Lady R. Then I won't destroy it. I'll improve it.

Cl. What are you going to do? I don't quite understand. Let me put it away.

Lady R. No, don't touch it. I often think of taking up painting again. This is evidently unfinished. Why is it unfinished?

Cl. I was afraid of spoiling it.

Lady R. Ah, that was when it was of some value; but now——

Cl. Now it doesn't matter. Let me put it away.

Lady R. I shall finish it myself.

Cl. You!

Lady R. Any valueless old thing will do to practise my hand on; I am just in the mood. You have painted enough this morning. It's my turn.

Cl. But Clara—

Lady R. Come, take my picture off the easel. There! There she is in my place. A change for the better, I think. Stand out of the light. I shall make her lovely.

(*As she begins to arrange the colours on the palette, he gets more and more anxious.*)

Cl. Here, try this. This sketch is much better to work on.

Lady R. Don't bother. I am bent on improving this young woman.

Cl. That's a very odd colour you are getting.

Lady R. What can it matter to you?

Cl. Clara, what are you at? Stop!

(*He snatches the picture from the easel.*)

Lady R. And the picture is of no value?

Cl. I beg your pardon, Clara.

Lady R. Valueless, but too valuable for me.

Cl. Clara, you won't understand.

Lady R. Oh yes, I will. A mere sketch, and absurdly flattered.

Cl. Flattered! (*He holds the picture in his hands, perusing it.*) How can you know?

Lady R. It is much prettier than Miss Tyrrel.

Cl. What do you mean? Well, yes, I believe, if I remember right, that it was taken from Miss Tyrrel.

Lady R. And I believe, if I remember right, that it is twice as pretty as Miss Tyrrel.

Cl. You have never seen her.

Lady R. Indeed I have.

Cl. Indeed! Where?

Lady R. Here.

Cl. In Rome?

Lady R. Here.

Cl. Here! What do you mean?

Lady R. Here, in this room.

Cl. Clara, I daresay that this is extremely amusing to you. I don't see the joke myself. I don't see why you should rake up this old story. Yes, I do see. You wish to quarrel, to find an excuse for not answering me, when I ask you——

Lady R. She was here.

Cl. The Tyrrels never leave Lindenhurst.

Lady R. The Tyrrels are in Rome.

Cl. Is this true? Don't push this joke too far.

Lady R. It is true.

Cl. Then I must go.

Lady R. Why?

Cl. Is it true that the Tyrrels are here in Rome?

Lady R. It is true.

Cl. I must go then. Oh, don't imagine anything extraordinary. It is a simple matter. These people were kind to me, kind with a generous hospitality which is rare. I stayed and stayed in

their house, until I thought that I should never go, until I feared that—— Well it came to this: Here were people who, in honesty and good faith, had treated me like a king; people who——

Lady R. Don't dilate upon the Tyrrel character just now.

Cl. What was I doing in return for all their goodness? I found myself trying to win the love of their only child, a girl with no knowledge of the world, who had seen no men to speak of, and who might take me, even me, for a very fine fellow.

Lady R. You were on the way to get what you wanted.

Cl. I was not a scoundrel. I knew myself: a man who had knocked about the world, a painting vagabond, a social cynic, not worthy to touch her hand or look into her eyes. High-flown, you think; but I was not a scoundrel, and I went away.

Lady R. But now?

Cl. Now? Well, now, I don't want to have to do the thing again.

Lady R. Then it would be hard to see her again and go?

Cl. Yes.

Lady R. You loved her?

Cl. I suppose so.

Lady R. I always thought that you were not a bad fellow.

Cl. I am not over-good. I don't wish to open an old wound. That's not extraordinary virtue, is it?

Lady R. And the girl? What of her?

Cl. By this time she has seen scores of men, in all respects better than me, confound them. She? Why she——

Lady R. Stop. Don't say too much about Miss Betty Tyrrel. Put her picture back and drop the subject. Put the picture back in its place.

Cl. Very well. I don't want to bore you.

(*So he goes to replace the picture, and draws aside the curtain. There is* BETTY TYRREL. *Then there is silence in the room for a time.*)

Betty. Mr Huntley, I am very sorry. I did not mean to listen.

Cl. Betty—Miss Tyrrel—is it you?

B. Oh, forgive me. I did not mean to listen.

Cl. And it is you indeed!

B. But I did not mean it. Oh, you believe that I did not hide myself here to listen.

Cl. You!

Lady R. It was my fault.

Cl. What do you mean?

Lady R. Do attend to me. Miss Tyrrel is my friend. She came to fetch me after my sitting. Finding that the studio belonged to you of all men in the world, she was frightened; and I put her there.

B. Thank you—oh, thank you. Mr Huntley, it is so good of her to say that. But I must tell you. We are living just opposite, papa and mamma and I; and I saw you go out; and I thought you were going away; and I never stopped to think; and I slipped out by myself; and I did so want to see the place where you worked. I did not stop to think; that was where I was wrong. And I found her here, and I was frightened.

Lady R. Yes, as I told you, she was frightened, and I put her in the corner. Good heavens, Claud! ain't you going to say something? Why do you stand there like a tragedian, or a Maypole? Oh, you men!

B. Won't you forgive me?

Cl. Forgive you! Why? Can you do any wrong? You have heard me say what I never dared to say in the old days. I am glad that you have heard me. You will think more kindly of me, some day, when——. May I see you safe

across the street? Will you say all kind things for me to Mr and Mrs Tyrrel?

Lady R. Is the man a fool?

B. You are not angry with me, then?

Cl. Are you not angry with me for having dared to love you?

B. I never was angry with you, not even when you went away so suddenly.

Cl. Were you sorry? Oh, take care, take care, child. Don't deceive me or yourself. Were you sorry when I went away?

B. We were all sorry, very sorry.

Cl. But you, you? You came here: would you stay here—with me? Oh child, is it possible that you should care for me?

B. Yes.

Cl. If I had known this!

Lady R. Any one but a man would have known it years ago. (*As she looks at* CLAUD *and* BETTY, *she begins to smile at her own thoughts.*) There

were only two in Paradise, in the first apple-orchard, unless you count the serpent; and that is a *rôle* for which I have neither inclination nor capacity.

(LADY ROEDALE *goes towards the door; and so ends the Comedy.*)

FIRE-FLIES

FIRE-FLIES.

(*The long row of windows is yellow with the festive light within, and yields gay music softened to the summer night: before the windows the broad terrace is mysterious under the rising moon; and far below dreams the old river, and the shadows fade from her. Ancient and grim is the city, with her palaces and prisons. Here on the terrace is a young woman, masked and musing: there is a young man, musing and masked. She speaks.*)

Bice. I am so sorry that I can't feel sad. I parted from Bino this morning. I love Bino. Certainly I love him. We are parted. Parted!

Why do I not feel sad? It is very distressing. The night is so beautiful and the dance so gay. For no woman in the world but the Vera would I dance after a parting from Bino. The Vera sent for me in her old imperious way, and here I am. Here am I in this cruel, cruel city, left alone, in gay attire, and hiding beneath the mask a sad, sad face. Only it is not sad. Ah me! There is too much joy in the air: the night is too beautiful: the music is too sweet: it comes to me like fairy music. The river lingers in the moonlight, and I linger. O Bino *mio*, O my love —what a very pleasant evening it is!

Bino. It is strange that I should be here, I who should be flying far away. After that parting from Bice, that sweet parting, how have I the heart to linger in this gay scene? It is gay. Where is that little wretch, our adorable hostess, the Vera? For no woman else would I linger so near the house, wherein I parted this morning from the sweetest creature of the world. Ah

me! it is a night of stars; the ancient river grows young in the moonlight; the air beats with the passion of a thousand mandolines. O beautiful night, I bless thee for the sake of my Bice. Perchance she leans from her window to the fragrant air of her garden, and whispers my name. Now she lays herself upon her little bed, and veils those violet eyes. Sleep little one, sleep while I watch. A sad and lonely vigil. Ah! the music! O Bice *mia*, to each cup which I shall quaff to-night, I will whisper one name, thy name. I will go quaff one now. —But who is this? A lady masked. If it should be the Vera. I dare swear 'tis she. I know her by a certain imperious trick of the elbow. I am never wrong in such matters. Will she know me? I think not. Now to go masquerading.—Fair lady!

Bice. Gentle cavalier!

Bino. What read you in the stars?

Bice. That day is done, sir.

Bino. But the light of love eternal.

Bice. It may be that the stars are eternal; it is certain that they are many.

Bino. And so unlike to love, who is but one.

Bice. Where did you learn to speak so cunningly?

Bino. Here. I was dumb till I saw you.

Bice. By my lady's parrot 'twere a better compliment to have been stricken dumb by the sight.

Bino. Alas! I have no gift of compliment.

I cannot flatter, no not I,
Oh no, not I;
I am all truth, sweet harmony,
And love by-and-by.

Bice. Save us from song! And yet beyond question you and I were born in one rhyming hour. For mark me now.

I cannot flatter, I am too true,
Oh much too true;
I like a many, love but few,
And love not you.

Bino. Shield me, ye sacred Nine, who were every one a woman! An improvising lady! I am dumb before genius.

Bice. I can no more, sir. Once in twenty-four hours I am a poet for five minutes.

Bino. And I have known more famous bards who were poets but once in ten years.

Bice. Indeed?

Bino. And that was in their youth. When the hoary head was crowned, there was but prose in the shrunken heart.

Bice. Are you a neglected poet?

Bino. Whether I am a poet, I know not. I know that I am neglected, and chiefly by ladies.

Bice. There is a vile manner of boasting of your successes.

Bino. Believe me, no. I speak in sober truth.

Bice. Truth and soberness! And you boasted yourself a poet.

Bino. Never.

Bice. Have you no imagination? Speak poetry, as you are a poet.

Bino. You will scorn me, as you are a woman. But stay. I am possessed by the God. Now the divine madness works. You draw poetry to you, lady, as the moon the tide. Hush!

O dainty mask, like our Italian night,
Most beautiful, and hiding all but stars,
Whose is the face thou hidest from my sight?
—Would I could find some other rhyme than "wars."

May wars never come between us.

Bice. My lips were not the first to frame the word.

Bino. Thy lips should frame things sweeter than mere speech.

Bice. I know no rhyme more gracious than, Absurd!

Bino. And I no rhyme less terrible than, Breach!

Bice. In truth, I fear you are but a camp-singer, for war and breach come quickest to your lips. You are no poet for a lady's chamber, to conjure a nap before dressing-time. Rather you should swagger in camp, and be clapped on the shoulder by comrade This and comrade That, with, "A draught of wine, my lad!" or, "A rousing song, my boy!" Ah, if you should be less a poet than a swashbuckler!

Bino. For it's ho! wine ho!
And give me a flagon of wine,
Till here and there I go,—what ho!
And reeling to and fro,—what ho!
Feel all the world is mine.

Bice. A kitchen-wench would cry "Good" to those lines. They are well enough to call a tapster—what ho!

Bino. O lady of the starry eyes,
O lady of the bitter tongue,
Lips should be taught more sweet replies,
While you and I are young.

Bice. Are you young? Many a mask hides wrinkles.

Bino. Not yours, on my life! Your mouth is not old.

Bice. No younger than my face, I give you my word.

Bino. I believe you.

Bice. 'Tis a marvel if a man believes a woman. We tell men the truth: they believe the opposite: and so we deceive them very pleasantly, and our conscience is saved.

Bino. By your lips you are young.

Bice. You wear a mask on your mouth.

Bino. Nay, 'tis but an indifferent moustachio.

Bice. A most delicate fringe for fibs.

Bino. I know that you are pretty. Is not that true?

Bice. It is not true that you know it. I wear a mask.

Bino. I know whose face is under it.

Bice. No man in the city knows that.

Bino. But we are in fairyland, and I know.
A flower city, rose of all the earth,
Most naughty city if all tales be true,
To one true woman of true race gave birth,—
That truant true and dainty dame is——

Bice. Not I, in faith. There is no truth in poetry even when bad. I am not the Vera. I am but that Bice who is known to friendly citizens as Bice of the yellow hair.

Bino. Not you. On my life, you are not she. And pray, how know you the lady?

Bice. So we tell men the truth, and they believe the opposite. O most exquisite sweet gulls! And you know this little Bice then, who I am not?

Bino. A little.

Bice. Is she so sharp of tongue as they say?

Bino. Her speech is gentle and her eyes soft.

Bice. So not like my eyes.

Bino. Your eyes! Why, they are afire with all the mischief of Europe. They twinkle like two naughty stars which love to cheat the mariner.

Bice. And yet they are the eyes of none other than Bice.

Bino. Let me look closer.

Bice. Whose eyes are those that look?

Bino. None know better than you.

Bice. Whose?

Bino. Ah, the little imperious one! I will tell you. I am the last man in this assembly who should declare himself to-night, and for that sufficient reason I will incontinently tell you that I am he.

Bice. Who?

Bino. He, who is more famous for his heels than his head, he who is the sworn comrade and boon companion of the duchess's ape, the prince of improvising rhymers, the loose ingredients of a poet, the pudding that never went into the bag, one who will eat green figs against any man or mule in Italy, the darling of his mother when his hair is dressed, the beloved of all ladies, himself more madman than lover, the one happy idler, and

known to all decorous citizens from the father of the senate to the cook's new dog with the liver patch over his right eye, as Bino of the merry heart.

Bice. No! on my life you are not he.

Bino. And so you know this Bino?

Bice. A little. He left the city to-day.

Bino. Who bade him stay for this sweet night of revel?

Bice. He did not stay, believe me.

Bino. I am he, believe me or not as you will, but you know it.

Bice. Stand in the moonlight.

Bino. Little princess, how you command me! You bid me do what I ought not, and therefore do I obey you.

O moon, my lady moon,
Sweet lady of the night
Lend me thy light,
And bid this fairer lady answer soon
If I am Messer Bino. Now behold!
Dian doth kiss me, and the tale is told.

(*He bares his face to the moonlight, and there is silence between them.*)

Bice. You are not the Bino that I knew.

Bino. The only one of the world, the very paragon of philosophers.

Bice. My Bino was a truer man.

Bino. Thy Bino! And who gave him to thee? But he is thine, all thine—for an hour or so.

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. You must not go till I have seen thee. The stars have seen my face. Let them see thine and learn to love.

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. And if it must be, well. I will not be so unmannerly to hold a lady here against her will. To our next merry meeting!

Bice. I leave the place to-morrow. Good-bye.

Bino. The whole city will follow you, from the head of the Council to the cook's dog aforesaid, lean princes and fat citizens, churches and palaces.

Why, the very bridges will run away with the river. The city cannot be without you, or I can breathe without breath. To our next merry meeting!

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. By the town-clerk you have no more variety than the cuckoo. Good-bye! Cuckoo!

Bice. Good-bye.

Bino. Cuckoo!

(*As Bice passes away into shadow, one of the big windows is darkened by a band of revellers, who pour forth on to the terrace with laughter and riot. As they flit in the moonlight with snatches of song, they leave the Vera alone in the window. She stands distinct against the yellow glare, which touches her hair with flame, but the moonshine is uncertain on her face. Is it she or the tremulous light that is*

laughing? Bino looks at her, and sees a witch or a ghost. As he stands staring, the masks come laughing once more, dancing with arms entwined, and bearing onward in their midst Bice, half-unwilling. As Bino goes quickly to them, they wheel away and leave the lady standing. Once again they darken the yellow light of the window, and when they are gone, the Vera is seen there no more.)

Bino. By magic and moonshine, lady, who are you?

Bice. Am I not the Vera?

Bino. No.

Bice. Alas, no! I am not gay, nor witty, nor pretty.

Bino. I cannot see, but I know that you are fairer than she.

Bice. You like me, then?

Bino. Like! The word is colder than the breath of Boreas. There is no such word in my language. I adore you.

Bice. You will add me to the list? O joy! Quick with your tablets. List of fair ladies beloved by Messer Bino:—

1. The Vera.
2. The unknown of the mask.
3. Bice the biondina.

Bino. Bice!

Bice. Ay, so they say. But I doubt if she be fair enough to grace the triumph of so great a conqueror. I have heard that she is crooked.

Bino. It was not true.

Bice. That her tongue is too sharp.

Bino. The kindest speech in Europe.

Bice. That her hair was not always so yellow.

Bino. The angels wove it of sunbeams.

Bice. The Graces help us! He has an attack of poetry. And so this little Bice is still on the

list. Strike out the fair unknown; and so once more Good-bye.

Bino. I love all ladies. Leave me not alone.

Bice. A devouring monster!

Bino. Nay, I am but like Cerberus, with three pairs of lips.

Bice. A most monstrous similitude. For see how far you must ever be from the gates of Paradise.

Bino. I am near thee.

Bice. Stand back, faithless man!

Bino. I am all faith.

Bice. For all women.

Bino. But I love in degrees. I pray you, let me see your face.

Bice. Swear that I have no rival, and I unmask.

Bino. How can I swear it?

Bice. With your triple mouth, and in each a double tongue. I am jealous of this Bice, with her hair woven of sunbeams, forsooth.

Bino. Put back your hood, and I will praise your locks more prettily.

Bice. It is said that you are promised to this Bice.

Bino. And you believe it?

Bice. It is said that she is beautiful.

Bino. Not beside thee. I pray thee, show thy face.

Bice. That she is very wise.

Bino. Believe me, no. Unmask.

Bice. Then she is ill-favoured, foolish, and you love her not.

Bino. Yes, yes. Now let me look on thee.

Bice. O moon, my lady moon,
Sweet lady of the night,
Lend me thy light,
And bid this exquisite gay masker swoon
At sight of hair the angels wove from gold;
Dian doth kiss me, and the tale is told.

(*She bares her face to the moonlight, and there is silence between them.*)

Bino. Bice!

Bice. Ill-favoured, foolish, and unloved.

Bino. Bice!

Bice. Most wearisome iteration. Cuckoo!

Bino. What shall I say?

Bice. Nothing.

Bino. What can I do?

Bice. Nothing but go.

Bino. O Bice, spare me! I love none but you.

Bice. And the masked lady.

Bino. I was but curious, no more.

Bice. Have men no vices that they must rob woman of her only fault? Leave curiosity to us.

Bino. Bice, if you love me——

Bice. I love you not.

Bino. Forgive me.

Bice. No. Good-bye.

Bino. Good-bye. But stay. Something puzzles me. Why are you here?

Bice. I? Because the Vera sent for me.

Bino. And I for the same reason.

Bice. No. I came for my pleasure.

Bino. And I for mine.

Bice. Most wickedly.

Bino. And you?

Bice. } How could you think of pleasure on
Bino. } the very day of our parting?

Bino. I always think of pleasure. I was made so. Is it very wrong to be happy?

Bice. Perhaps not. Alas! I am womanly weak in argument.

Bino. I will reason and you shall love. The head and the heart are best together.

Bice. We are young. It is not wrong to be young.

Bino. And we love each other.

Bice. To love is one thing, to laugh is another.

Bino. Yet love and laughter fly well together, as the doves of Venus.

Bice. Can you laugh with all, and love but one?

Bino. I have. I do. I will.

Bice. I will too.

Bino. There are a myriad stars, and but one moon.

Bice. There are many nights in the year, but never another like this.

Bino. It is a night for dancing.

Bice. It is a night for laughter.

Bino. It is a night for love.

Bice. For mandoline, guitar, quick vows, and quick forgetting.

Bino. For countless ripples of folly and one deep sea of love.

Bice. Let us dance.

Bino. Let us be happy together.

Bice. Joyous together, and not unhappy apart.

Bino. Never apart and ever happy. Let us dance.

(*So they flit in the moonlight: the Vera comes stepping through the window but they see her not: behind her the masks are peering. The music swells forth triumphant, and slowly dies to silence: the lights in the palace grow faint and fainter, and die: a mist creeps up from the river: a cloud goes over the moon: there is night and nothing more.*)

PICKING UP THE PIECES

PICKING UP THE PIECES.

It is morning in MRS MELTON'S *apartment in Florence. All the furniture is gathered into the middle of the room, and covered with a sheet.* MRS MELTON *is a widow and no longer young.* LORD DAWLISH, *who comes to call, has also forgotten his youth.*

Dawlish. Good morning, Mrs Melton. I hope —— Holloa! There is nobody here. What is all this about?

(*After some consideration he proceeds to investigate the extraordinary erection with*

the point of his stick. After convincing himself of its nature he lifts a side of the sheet, pulls out an easy-chair, inspects it, and finally sits on it.)

She is an extraordinary woman. I don't know why I like her. I don't know why she likes me. I suppose that she does like me. If not, what a bore I must be! I come here every day—and stay. I suspect that I am an awful fellow to stay. I suppose I ought to go now. This furniture trophy don't look like being at home to callers. But perhaps she is out: and then I can go on sitting here. I must sit somewhere. May I smoke? I daresay: thank ye, I will. Smoke? Smoke. There is a proverb about smoke. I wonder how I came to know so many proverbs. I don't know much. "There is no smoke without fire." Yes, that's it. There is uncommon little fire in a cigarette. Little fire and much smoke. Yes, that's like this—— I mean——

Let me—what d'ye call it?—review my position. Here I sit. Here I sit every day. That is smoke, I suppose—plenty of smoke. Is there any fire? That is the question. I wish people would mind their own business. It is trouble enough to mind one's own business, I should think. But yet there are people—there's that Flitterly, for instance—damned little snob. Flitterly makes it the business of his life to go about saying that I am going to be married; and all because here is a woman who is not such an intolerable bore as—as other people. Flitterly is the sort of man who says that there is no smoke without fire. What is this? That is what I want to know. Is this business of mine all smoke, all cigarette and soda, or—confound Flitterly! I wonder if I ought to pull his nose. I am afraid that that sort of thing is out of date. I don't think I could pull a nose, unless somebody showed me how. Perhaps if somebody held him steady, I might. I don't think I could do it. He has got such a ridiculous little

nose. I wonder if I ought to give up coming here. I don't know where I should go to. I wonder if I am bound in honour, and all that. Perhaps that is out of date too. I sometimes think that I am out of date myself. (*After this he fishes under the sheet with his stick, and brings to light a photograph-book, which he studies as he continues to meditate.*)

I wonder if she would take me if I asked her. I don't believe she would: she is a most extraordinary woman. Who is this, I wonder? I never saw this book before. I suppose that this is the sort of man women admire. He would know how to pull a nose. I daresay he has pulled lots of noses in his day. Does it for exercise. Suburban cad. A kind of little Tooting lady-killer. I wonder she puts such a fellow in her book. Why, here he is again, twice as big and fiercer. Here is another—and another. Hang him, he is all over the book.

(*He pitches the book under the sheet. Then* MRS MELTON *comes in wearing a large apron, and armed with duster and feather-brush.*)

Mrs Melton. Lord Dawlish! What are you doing here?

D. Nothing.

Mrs M. How well you do it!

D. Thank you.

Mrs M. But you are doing something: you are smoking.

D. Am I? I beg your pardon.

Mrs M. And you shall do more: you shall help me. I have been up to my eyes in work since seven o'clock.

D. Seven! Why don't you make somebody else do it?

Mrs M. Because I do it so well. I have a genius for dusting, and Italian servants have not.

In this old city they have an unfeigned respect for the dust of ages.

D. Have they? How funny! But they might help you, I should think. Where are they? There was nobody to let me in. Where are your servants?

Mrs M. Gone.

D. Gone!

Mrs M. Gone and left me free. I packed them all off—man and maid, bag and baggage.

D. But who will look after you?

Mrs M. I. I am fully equal to the task. But come, be useful. You shall help me to rearrange the furniture.

D. Help! I!

Mrs M. Yes, help! You! I am not quite sure that you can't.

(*As he proceeds to brush the back of a chair with a feather-brush, it occurs to him to apologise for his intrusion.*)

D. I suppose I ought to apologise for coming so early. Somehow I found myself in the Palazzo —and the door of your apartments was open, and so I came in. I took the liberty of an old friend.

Mrs M. I believe we have been acquainted for at least a month.

D. Only a month! It is not possible. It must be more than a month.

Mrs M. Apparently our precious friendship has not made the time pass quickly.

D. No. I mean that it never does pass quickly.

Mrs M. Work, work, work! It's work that makes the day go quick. I am busy from morning till night, and time flies with me.

D. Then you shorten your life.

Mrs M. And keep it bright. Better one hour of life than a century of existence! Dear, dear! how did my best photograph-book get knocked down here?

D. I am afraid that that was my awkwardness. I was looking at it, and it—it went down there.

Mrs M. Don't let it break from you again. Here, take it, and sit down and be good. You have no genius for dusting.

D. Nobody ever called me a genius. I have been called all sorts of names; but nobody ever went so far as to call me a genius.

Mrs M. And yet you ain't stupid. I always maintain that you are not really stupid.

D. Ain't I? Thank you. Who is this man—this fine-looking man with the frown and whiskers?

Mrs M. He is handsome, isn't he?

D. I don't know. I am not a judge of male beauty.

Mrs M. Men never admire each other. They are too envious and too vain.

D. Are they? And women? What are women?

Mrs M. What are women? What are they not? Oh for one word to comprehend the sex! Women are—yes, women are womanly.

D. That sounds true. And women are effeminate.

Mrs M. Only females are effeminate.

D. Oh! I wonder what that means.

Mrs M. But John is handsome. Ask any woman.

D. John!

Mrs M. Yes, that's John—my cousin.

D. I hate cousins. They are so familiar and so personal.

Mrs M. I like them. They are so—so——

D. Cousinly.

Mrs M. Precisely.

D. Cousins are cousinly. Does he dye his whiskers?

Mrs M. Dye! Never. He has too much to do. John is a great man—a man of will, a man of force, a man of iron. That's what I call a man.

D. Do you? I don't call an iron man a man.

Mrs M. He is the first of American engineers.

D. A Yankee stoker.

Mrs M. Dear John! He is a good fellow. He gave me that little jar by your hand.

D. Dear John is not a judge of china. I

always hated that little jar. I shall break it some day.

Mrs M. If you do, I'll never speak to you again.

D. Please do. Tell me some more about John. Has not he got a fault, not even a little one?

Mrs M. He has the fault of all men—vanity. He knows that he is handsome.

D. I thought he dyed his whiskers.

Mrs M. He does not dye his whiskers.

D. You seem very keen about the whiskers. Here they are in all sizes, and from all over the world—*carte-de-visite* whiskers, cabinet whiskers, Rembrandt-effect whiskers, whiskers from Naples, from New York, from Baker Street. You must like them very much.

Mrs M. I like the man. I like self-respect, bravery, and perseverance. I like honest work. Oh, Lord Dawlish, what a shame it is that you don't do something!

D. Do something? I? I do do something. I —well, I go about.

Mrs M. Oh! you go about.

D. Yes—with a dog in England; without a dog abroad.

Mrs M. Oh! abroad without a dog. I regret that I shall never have the pleasure of receiving the cur.

D. The cur's a collie.

Mrs M. And so you think that man fulfils his destiny by going about.

D. Somebody must go about, you know.

Mrs M. Yes, a squirrel in a cage. What you want is work. You ought to take a line.

D. Go fishing?

Mrs M. Be serious, and listen to me. Here you are in Florence.

D. I believe I am.

Mrs M. You are in the midst of priceless treasures. The finest works of art are all around you.

D. I believe they are.

Mrs M. Take a line: take up something, for instance the Greek statues.

D. Ain't I rather old to play with marbles?

Mrs M. Not a bit. Nobody is old who isn't old on purpose. Compare, classify, and make a book, or even a pamphlet.

D. I hate pamphlets. They are always coming by the post.

Mrs M. I suppose it's not the thing for a man in your position to turn author.

D. I don't think I ever did hear of one of our lot writing books. But that don't much matter. I should like to take a line, or a course, or a—I took a course of waters once at Homburg, or Kissingen, or somewhere; but they came to an end, like other things.

Mrs M. Lord Dawlish, are you joking?

D. No.

Mrs M. Then be serious: take up a subject; set to work; produce your pamphlet—at least a pamphlet. It might grow into a book.

D. Heaven forbid! I could not do it.

Mrs M. Why not?

D. Writing a book is so infernally public. I should be talked about.

Mrs M. How dreadful! The owl, who is modest withal, and shrinks from notoriety, remains at home until sunset.

D. You called me a squirrel before. Are you going through all the zoological what-d'ye-call-'em?

Mrs M. Perhaps even I shall be talked about before long.

D. I should not wonder if you were.

Mrs M. Yes, even I, humble individual as I am, may perhaps be talked about when I set up my studio.

D. Your what?

Mrs M. My studio. Yes, I've quite made up my mind. There are many worse painters in Florence than myself. I mean to be a real painter, and no longer play with colour.

D. And sell your pictures?

Mrs M. For the largest possible prices.

D. Is not that an odd sort of thing for a lady?

Mrs M. No. We have changed all that. Many women paint nowadays.

D. I have heard so.

Mrs M. I believe that you are making jokes this morning.

D. I don't think so. I don't like jokes; they are very fatiguing. It's John's fault.

Mrs M. What's John's fault.

D. No man likes to have another crammed down his throat—unless he is a confounded cannibal.

Mrs M. Very well. I will refrain from cramming anybody down your throat. But I won't let you off. I feel that I have a mission.

D. Good heavens!

Mrs M. I have a mission to reform you.

D. Please don't do it.

Mrs M. I must. Why don't you do your proper work? Why not go back to England and take care of your property?

D. Because my agent takes care of it so much better than I could. I inherited my place, and I can't get rid of it. But, luckily, land can't follow me about. That is why I come abroad.

Mrs M. Without the dog.

D. He stays with the land. He likes it. He hates travelling.

Mrs M. So would you if you travelled in a dog-box.

D. I wish you would not talk about me. I am so tired of myself.

Mrs M. But you interest me.

D. Thank you. That is gratifying. Don't let us pursue the subject further.

Mrs M. I must. It's my mission. I picture the pleasures of an English country life. You build cottages; you drain fields; you carry flannel to the old women.

D. No; I could not do it. I don't think I could carry flannel to an old woman.

Mrs M. So much for duties. Then for amusement. Are you fond of shooting?

D. Pheasants are all so much alike. I gave up shooting when my sister took to it.

Mrs M. Your sister!

D. She is a keen sportsman—awfully keen. I went out with her once. I feel them still sometimes in my back when it's cold weather.

Mrs M. You like hunting better. In this country they shoot the fox.

D. Do they? That must be curious. I wonder if I could bring myself to try that. I almost think that——

Mrs M. Go home and hunt.

D. I have given up hunting. Rather rough on Teddie, don't you think?

Mrs M. Who's Teddie?

D. Don't you know Teddie?

Mrs M. Is he the dog?

D. No; he is my brother. I thought that everybody knew Teddie. Teddie knows everybody.

Teddie likes me to hunt. He is always bothering me to buy horses—with tricks. Or to go by excursion trains. Or to shoot lions in Abyssinia. He is an awfully ambitious fellow, Teddie. Don't you think we might change the subject?

Mrs M. Not yet. I have not done my duty yet. Politics! Oh for political influence! Oh for power! Why, you must be—of course you are a—thingummy what's-his-name.

D. Very likely, if you say so.

Mrs M. An hereditary legislator. Think of that. Think of your influence in the country; of the power you might wield. Go in for politics.

D. Well, you know, I—I inherited my politics with my place, and I can't get rid of them. But Teddie does them for me. He was always rather a muff, Teddie was; and so they put him into politics.

Mrs M. Are there muffs in your family? Don't interrupt me. I must have the last word. Anything else I will give up, but the last word—never. In your position you must sway something.

If you won't sway the country, sway the county; if you won't sway the county, sway a vestry, a workhouse, a something, or anything. Only do something. You would be a great deal happier, and —I don't know why I should be afraid to say—a great deal better, if you would only do something.

D. You forget that I am delicate. The doctors say I am delicate, and that is why I come abroad. I do wish you would change the subject. It is a delicate subject, you know.

Mrs M. Don't be funny! You have only one malady—idleness.

D. No, no, no! All the doctors.

Mrs M. Quacks!

D. As you please. But I have not the rude health of some strong-minded women.

Mrs M. Nor I the rude manners of some weak-minded men. But I beg your pardon; *I* won't be rude.

D. Was I rude? I am awfully sorry. I beg your pardon. But I am so tired of myself.

Mrs M. Then work—work and be cured. Do something—anything. A stitch in time saves nine.

D. Oh, if you come to proverbs—Look before you leap.

Mrs M. Procrastination is the thief of time.

D. More haste less speed. If one does nothing, at least one does no harm.

Mrs M. Nor does a stuffed poodle.

D. Another beast! I have been a squirrel and an owl. And after all, I did not come here to talk about myself, nor poodles.

Mrs M. Did you come to speak of the weather?

D. I wanted to speak about you.

Mrs M. About me! Here's a turning of the tables.

D. May I?

Mrs M. If you have energy for so lively a topic.

D. May I speak plainly, as an old friend?

Mrs M. As a month-old friend. Speak plainly by all means. I've a passion for plain speaking.

D. It is an uncommonly disagreeable subject.

Mrs M. Thank you. You were going to talk about me.

D. I don't mean that; of course not. It does not matter whether I talk about you or not. But there are other people here who talk about you.

Mrs M. Talk about me? What do they say?

D. They say things I don't like; so I thought that I——

Mrs M. Thank you, Lord Dawlish; but I can take very good care of myself.

D. Very well.

Mrs M. Why should I care what this Anglo-Florentine Society say of me? It doesn't hurt me; I don't care what they say of me; I am entirely indifferent; I am—— Oh, do not stand there like a stick, but tell me what these people say about me.

D. I—I—— It is so awkward for me to tell you. You know Flitterly?

Mrs M. Flitterly! A sparrow!

D. Oh, he is a sparrow! What is to be done to the sparrow?

Mrs M. Nothing. He is beneath punishment —beneath contempt. A little chattering, intrusive, cruel—— I suppose it would not do for me to horsewhip Flitterly?

D. It would be better for me to do that. I thought of pulling his nose: it is a little one; but I might do it with time. I think I should enjoy it.

Mrs M. It's too bad! It's too bad that a woman of my age should not be safe from these wretches — from the tongues of these malicious chatterers. The cowards, to attack a woman!

D. I was afraid that you would feel it.

Mrs M. I don't feel it. Why should I? Why should I feel it? But, good gracious! is the man going to stand there all day, and never tell me what this—what that—that—pha! what *he* says of me?

D. I don't like to tell you.

Mrs M. Do you take me for a fool, Lord Dawlish?

D. No; for a woman.

Mrs M. What does he say?

D. If you will know, you must. He says—he says that you and I are going to be married.

Mrs M. Married! You and I! Well, at least he might have invented something less preposterous.

D. Preposterous!

Mrs M. You and I!

D. I don't see anything preposterous in it. Why should not you and I be married? By George, I have made an offer!

Mrs M. Are you mad? You say——

D. Oh, I don't want to hurry you. Don't speak in a hurry. Think it over; think it over. Take time.

Mrs M. But do you mean——

D. Oh, please, don't hurry. Think it over. Any time will do.

Mrs M. Will it?

D. I am not clever, nor interesting; but if you don't mind me, I will do anything I can.

You shall have any sort of society you like: fast or slow; literary or swell; or anything. Of course there would be plenty of money, and jewels, and cooks, and all that. You can have gowns, and cheque-books, and pin-money, and——

Mrs M. And find my own washing and beer. Lord Dawlish, are you offering me a situation?

D. Yes—no—I mean that I——

Mrs M. A thousand thanks. The wages are most tempting; but I have no thought of leaving my present place.

D. I fear that I have been offensive. I beg your pardon. I had better go. Good morning, Mrs Melton.

Mrs M. Good-bye, Lord Dawlish.

(*So he goes out; straightway her mood changes, and she wishes him back again.*)

Mrs M. (*sola*). He will never come back. I can't let him go for ever. I can't afford to lose

a friend who makes me laugh so much. Flitterly may say what he likes—a goose! a sparrow! a grasshopper! I shall call him back.

(*So she calls to him down the stair; then from the window; and as she calls from the window, he comes in at the door, watches her awhile, then speaks.*)

D. Did you call me, Mrs Melton?

Mrs M. Is the man deaf? I have been screaming like a peacock; and all for your sake—all because I didn't want you to go away angry.

D. I thought it was you who were angry.

Mrs M. No, it was you.

D. Very well.

Mrs M. You must drop the *preposterous* subject for ever; and we will be good friends, as we were before. Sit down and be friendly.

D. Thank you. That is capital. We will be as we were before—as we were before.

Mrs M. You are sure you can bear the disappointment?

D. Oh yes. We will be friends, as we were. That is much better.

Mrs M. Lord Dawlish, you are simply delicious!

D. Am I? Thank you. And I may come and sit here sometimes?

Mrs. M. In spite of Flitterly.

D. Flitterly be ——

Mrs M. Yes, by all means.

(*Then he meditates, and after due deliberation speaks.*)

D. I should like to ask you something, Mrs Melton—something personal.

Mrs M. Ask what you like, and I will answer if I choose.

D. May I ask as a friend—only as a friend, you know—if you are quite determined never to marry again? I know that it is no business of

mine; but I can't help being curious about you. I don't think I am curious about anything else. But you are such an extraordinary woman.

Mrs M. Extraordinary because I have refused to be Lady Dawlish. It is strange, very. Oh, don't be alarmed; I have refused. But it is strange. I am a woman, and I refused rank and wealth. Wealth means gowns and cooks from Paris, a brougham and a victoria, a stepper, a tiger, and a pug: rank means walking out before other women, and the envy of all my sex. I am a woman, and I refuse these luxuries. You were mad when you offered them.

D. I don't think that I could be mad.

Mrs M. Not another word upon the subject.

D. But won't you satisfy my curiosity?

Mrs M. I never knew you so persistent.

D. I never was persistent before.

Mrs M. Such ardent curiosity, such desperate perseverance, deserve to be rewarded. I have

nothing to do for the moment, and there is one luxury which no woman can forego—the luxury of talking about herself. You needn't listen if the effort is too great: I address the chair, or the universe. You will hardly believe it of me; but I cherish a sentiment. There! Years and years ago—how many, I am woman enough not to specify—I lived with an aunt in Paris. You hate cousins; I am not in love with aunts: however, she was my only relation; there was no choice, and there I lived with her in Paris, and was finished; there was nothing to finish, for I knew nothing. Well, it was there, in Paris—I was quite a child—it was there that I one day met a boy scarcely older than myself. I am in love with him still. Quite idyllic, isn't it?

D. Very likely. In Paris? Paris.

Mrs M. There never was any one in the world like him—so brave, so good, so boyish: he rejoiced in life, certain of pleasure and purposing noble work.

D. (*aside*). Cousin John! Cousin John, of course. Confound Cousin John!

Mrs M. He fell in love with me at once, almost before I had fallen in love with him. We were both so absurdly shy, so silly, and so young. I can see him blush now, and I could blush then. But I shall be sentimental in a minute; this is egregious folly; of course it is folly, and it was folly; of course it was merely childish fancy, boy-and-girl sentiment, calf-love; of course a week's absence would put an end to it; and of course I love him still. But forgive me, Lord Dawlish. Why should I bother you with this worn-out commonplace romance?

D. I like it. It interests me. Go on, if it does not bore you. It reminds me of something —of something which I had better forget.

Mrs M. You shall hear the rest: there isn't much. He was taken away, and—I suppose forgot me. I came out in Paris, went everywhere, was vastly gay, and terribly unhappy. My aunt

was youngish, and good-looking—in a way; she was dying to be rid of me, and I knew it; and so things were very uncomfortable at home, until —until I married. Oh, I told him the truth, the whole truth: I told him that the love of my life had gone by. I am glad I told him the truth.

D. He was American, wasn't he?

Mrs M. Yes. I was grateful to him, and proud of him. He was good as man can be. But he made light of my story. He thought, like the rest, that it was a mere girlish fancy; that I should soon forget; that—— There, you have my story! Touching, isn't it?

D. It is most extraordinary.

Mrs M. What is most extraordinary?

D. Your story is like my story.

Mrs M. It's everybody's story. It's common as the whooping-cough, and dull as a great thaw. But come, give me the details of your case.

D. The details! If I can remember them.

Mrs M. If you can remember! Who would be a man?

D. It was in Paris——

Mrs M. In Paris?

D. It is just like your story. Suppose that we take it as told.

Mrs M. Go on. I must hear it.

D. I was sent to Paris when I was a boy, with a bear-leader. There I saw a girl—a little bread-and-butter miss,—and—and I got fond of her—awfully fond of her. She was the dearest little girl — the best little thing. She was like—like——

Mrs M. Go on. What happened?

D. Nothing.

Mrs M. Nothing! Nonsense! Something always happens.

D. Nothing came of it. They said boy and girl, and calf-love, and all that, like the people in your story: and they packed me off to England.

Mrs M. Why did you go?

D. I always was a fool. They said that it would try the strength of her feelings; that, if we were both of the same mind when I had got my degree, the thing should be.

Mrs M. And you never wrote?

D. No.

Mrs M. Nor did he—never one line.

D. They said she wished me not to write.

Mrs M. How likely! These men, these men! They never know what letters are to women. What was the end?

D. The usual thing. As soon as my degree was all right I made for Paris. She was gone.

Mrs M. My poor friend! She was dead.

D. Married.

Mrs M. Married! how could she be so——

D. It is very like your story, ain't it? Only in my story the parties were not American.

Mrs M. American! What do you mean? I wasn't an American till I married one, and Tom——

D. Then it wasn't cousin John?

Mrs M. John! No, no, no! Lord Dawlish! —Lord Dawlish, what is your family name?

D. My family name? What on earth, my dear Mrs Melton——

Mrs M. Quick, quick! What is it?

D. Why—er—why—Dashleigh, of course.

Mrs M. And you are Tom Dashleigh?

(*As she looks at him, the truth dawns on him.*)

D. And you are little Kitty Gray?

Mrs M. Oh my bright boy-lover, you are lost now indeed.

D. I think I have got a chill.

(*When they have sat a little while in silence, she jumps up.*)

Mrs M. No more sentiment, no more folly! Away with sentiment for ever! The boy and girl lovers are dead long ago; and we old folk who

know the world may strew flowers on their grave and be gone. Look up, old friend, look up.

D. Yet you are you, and I—I suppose that I am I.

Mrs M. Young fools! young fools! why should we pity them, we wise old folk who know the world? Love is but—is but——

(*And she dashes into music at the piano: soon her hands begin to fail, and she stoops over them to hide her eyes; then she jumps up in tears, and moving knocks over the little jar which was cousin John's gift. He would pick it up, but she stops him.*)

No, no: let it lie there.

D. Shan't I pick up the pieces?

Mrs M. Let them lie there. One can never pick up the pieces.

D. Why not? I don't think I understand. But I can't bear to see you cry. I thought that

43622

you could not cry; that you were too clever and strong-minded to cry. Look here! You might have made something of me once. Is it too late, Mrs Melton?

Mrs M. The jar is broken.

D. Is it too late, Kitty?

Mrs M. Let us pick up the pieces together.

HALF-WAY TO ARCADY

HALF-WAY TO ARCADY.

A Poet dressed in evening clothes, but somewhat dusty, meets an Arcadian girl upon the road.

He. Here, child! Is this the way to Arcady?

She. Yes, noble lord.

He. No noble lord am I.
I am a poet, and a weary one.
Give me a drink of water. Child, the sun
Will fleck that dainty skin with golden kisses,
Termed freckles by our milk-of-almond misses.
Turn from the glaring road a little space:
The spreading beach will shade the dimpled face,

The frolic face, a light in shady nook:
Nay, do not fear! It has been mine to look
On many million women; therefore I,
Or partly therefore, go to Arcady.

She. But there are women in Arcadia.

He. Are there? To lead the yokel hearts astray,—
And mine, perhaps. Ah me! to lie along
A little brook, a shepherd from a song;
A little babbling brook, and plait the reeds,
To watch the dance young Amaryllis leads,
To hum a catch of Pan and Nymph and Faun
Laughing and leaping on the upland lawn,
To taste pure milk, to sleep before the sun,
Wake with the sheep and with the sheep-dog run,
To plunge in brawling stream, rest on the sod
As free and naked as a woodland god—
Ah, to be there! How far is't?

She. Let me see.
Fair sir, since sunrise I've walked steadily—

He. You come from Arcady?

She. Of course, my lord.

He. Poor child! and you have left the land adored
By sheep and poets. Say, what cruel fate
Has sent you thence to wander desolate
In this cramped world of licence, law, and lie?

She. What sent me? No one sent me, sir, but I
Was grown so weary of the silly sheep
And silly shepherds—oh, they peer and peep,
And sing their songs all to one lazy tune
Of ribbons and of roses, and warm June,
And bells are always tinkling, breezes sighing
For nothing, and the leaves so long a-dying—
And so, sir, I was tired and ran away.

He. Where do you go?

She. To Paris, and to day,
To life, to life!—Oh pardon me, fair sir,
I talk too much.

He. I like those lips astir
With funny little fancies, rosebud lips,
A rose of dew; and now a sunbeam slips

Through frolic beech-leaves for a kiss I ween;
Now the lips part, and so he slips between.
You sit so meek and pretty in the shade,
Were I not tired of women, I'm afraid
That I should learn of sunbeams—nay, don't fear
me,
I've seen so many pretty women near me.'
Fold little hands, turn great grave eyes on mine,
And I will teach you wisdom,—how they shine,
Those merry eyes! and are they blue or brown?—
'Tis good to live afar from noisy town,
To live a simple life in woodland wild,
Child in a child's world, evermore a child;
'Tis good to cut the reed and sound the lay,
To lead the sheep, and watch the lambkins play;—

She. Oh, sir, I've watched the lambkins, and the
game
Our lambkins play is every day the same;
I'm weary of their dance.

He. The lark at morn
Leaps, a live song, above the yellow corn;

The hours go by to music; when the sun
Slopes to the west, their day-long pleasures done,
The simple souls betake themselves to rest—
Blest race indeed if they but knew how blest.

She. Ah, sir, but what are days and days like these
To Paris hours and gaslight in the trees—
A glare, a maze, a murmur?

He. Listen, child!
In that old shell of Paris was I styled
Prince of misrule, mirth, madness, mockery,
No lord of laughter half so loud as I;
No cup so deep as mine, no heart so gay.
Do I look very happy?

She. Dare I say?
Dare I speak out my thought? Fair sir, your face
Has in it something that did never grace
Our most sweet-smiling shepherd: I can guess
That it is what we long for—weariness.
There's no life to grow weary of at home.

He. Each year the apple-orchards break to foam

Of sun-tipped blossom, every leaf is new
On every tree, and all the sky is blue.
Slowly the fresh green turns to deep rich shade,
Slowly gnarled boughs with fruit are overweighed,
Swell the fair clusters on the swinging vine,
The year grows old in beauty. Maiden mine,
No charms in dusty Paris will you see
One half so sweet as your simplicity.

She. My poor simplicity! My silliness!
I pray you do not mock me, sir; distress
Makes my voice fail; indeed I don't know why,
But I am very silly: if I cry
You'll laugh again, and I shall cry the more.
I pray you do not mock me.

He. Not for store
Of moments dear as this, of sweet replies,
Of April dawning in those lips and eyes!
I mock you not. I smile because 'tis sweet
To see the fretted sunlight at our feet.
I smile, because your eyes are large and round;
I smile to think I sit on grassy mound

And prattle with a girl; while far away
The huddled crowd of Paris wear the day
Uneasy—flitting on from sport to sport,
Stabbing with jest, and winging quick retort,
Playing and playing, lest they see pass by
Young Pleasure's drear-eyed mate, Satiety.
Fever of life, O absinthe, cigarette,
O endless theatre where in order set
A dull-eyed people all the long night through
Sit without hope of seeing something new!
O dulness smartly uttered! paradox;
O hired applause, bought flowers from the box!
O acres of stretched canvas, where with skill
The painter shows new forms of every ill—
Historic bloodshed, new-distorted dress,
And unimagined, undraped ugliness!
O pleasure without laughter, strange disease
Of mad amusements that can never please!
O storm and stress of gold, and fuss, and feather!
O hollow Paris, you and I together

Have run the weary round of mirth.—But now!
Now the quick air comes wooing; on the bough
A squirrel stops to listen; one small bird
Is talkative, and naught beside is heard,
Save murmur of wise bees amid the bloom;
While far away the dim musk-scented room
Is shut from sunlight, and the ear is full
Of clatter, and the restless eye grows dull.
O pretty girl of laughter all compact,
Of little fancy, and of simple fact,
Maid o' the milking, queen of holiday,
My brier-rose from the close hedge astray,
My heart can beat again, my eyes can see;
I sought Arcadia, and she came to me.
Here will we rest.

She. But, sir, is Paris near?

He. Take me, take Paris; I have Paris here,
Here in my shrivelled heart, my weary face,
Here in my tailor's artificial grace,
In scorn of joys which can no more delay me,
In arrogance which bids you thus obey me.

I am all Paris, spoiled child of the sun,
And I am at your feet, my little one.

She. Oh, sir, I dare not—sir, I cannot speak.

He. Then kiss for answer, for all words are weak.
Up, little heart! an altar quick prepare
Of well-trimmed turf entwined with flowers fair—
The buds are tame in Paris: here will I
Dwell with my love half-way to Arcady:
Free from fierce joys and more abiding pain,
Clear to Lord Hymen raise the simple marriage strain.

SONG.

Now together let us sing,
Hymen, Hymen! Hours take wing.
Hours quick-winged with our delight
Gone like smoke that's blue and bright
In the happy morning air.
Quick, then, with flowers fair!
Flowers to the altar bring—
Simple sweet our offering—
And both together sing

O Hymen, be propitious, Hymen,
O Hymen, Hymenæe.

(*He sings.*)

Where the altar turf is set,
Smoke of perfumed cigarette
Melts to air, and flame springs high
From the liquor fierce that I
Pour from this my silver flask.

(*They both sing.*)

Thus we end our easy task,
And the happy rite is done.
Now westward slopes the sun
All the sky, as he goes down,
Takes the glow of saffron gown,
As far from noisy town
We raise our song of Hymen, Hymen,
O Hymen, Hymenæe.

Thus sang the two together sweet and low,
And days went by in order sweet and slow;
And sweet and low birds chattered 'mid the bloom;
And sweet and slow was life to bride and groom—
Lo! life was sweet to her and slow to him.
The whimsical had gratified his whim.
Morn brings the cows, at eve they homeward go,
But no morn brings the far-off Figaro;
And yet 'tis good to sit with lazy feet
Dropped in the stream, and think of dusty street;
To milk the evening cow, nor care for haste,
Recalling absinthe and less lacteal taste.
O gay the chatter of Arcadian lass,
O gay the boulevard all aglare with gas,
O gay, O gay!—Once at that calm abode
Was dropped a last year's paper in the road;
And one wild day a stray Arcadian swain
Grinned through the leaves, and went away again.

MABEL'S HOLY DAY

MABEL'S HOLY DAY.

In a Garden.

Arthur. He came, saw, and was conquered.
Lady mine,
You cannot choose but conquer; in mere sport
You triumph, and your prize a human heart;
Where others strive, you take your ease and win,—
Win for you must; and so our friend was won,—
Tamed to the rose-chain which I've worn so long.
Was never victory more swift and sure!

Mabel. Never.

A. A week, day, hour—nay, not so much;
He came, he saw, was conquered. Victory!
Glory to you and me!

M. Take all the glory.

A. No—though 'twas I that dragged him from his books,
'Twas you that tamed him. Bent o'er dusty books
There was my friend, my Ralph, my dear sworn brother,
After some hundred years or so turned—poet,
Spoiling his eyes—the boy has pleasant eyes—
Gnawing a weighty tome, grub, scholar, mole,
Philosopher of dusk and dust—and poet.
I found him, and I dragged him forth to light.

M. To gaslight.

A. Yes, to gaslight—best of lights.
There he sat blinking—'twas the rarest sport—
The innocent had never seen a play,
Never! He knew his Shakspeare, loved the book;
But not the boards; they said the modern stage
Was all unworthy; so he only came
Because I prayed him, and we had been friends.

M. You had been friends?

A. Friends? Yes, the closest friends.
Oh but to see the change! There he sat dazed,

Puzzled, disdainful; and the play began.
What's this? The dazed eyes open round and bright.
What's this? Black-letter? parchment? manuscript?
A student's prize? Newest old-fashioned verse,
Or old verse new the fashion? Yes, by Love,
By the great little master! Such a scroll
As not all libraries on earth can match,
Parchment of living words, live manuscript,
Most old, most new, the very fount of song,
The world writ small in poetry—a woman.
He did not know the kind.

M. And does he know it?

A. He learns his lesson daily at your feet.

M. What shall you do? Where do you go to-day?

A. I am to go? I weary you?

M. Not much.

A. I cannot comprehend you.

M. I hope not.

A. I can but leave you.

M. You are very kind.

A. Sphinx though you be, you make your meaning clear.

Adieu, most potent lady: Queen, farewell,
Give my respects to Master Ralph; farewell,
Most arbitrary lady, queen of hearts,
Queen of the stage——

M. Don't speak about the stage:
I would forget—this is my holiday—
Let me forget the actress—so good-bye!

A. Good-bye. The gate grates on the gravel-walk;
He comes, I go—all pass; he goes, I come;
We are two buckets at one well. Good-bye.
You'll educate my friend.

M. Your friend! And mine?

(ARTHUR *goes away. Presently* RALPH *comes through the shrubbery; as* MABEL *gives him her hand, he begins to speak quickly.*)

Ralph. Oh what a day! Are you at last
content?
My lady, did you ever see such a day?
M. I have seen many days.
R. But none like this.
Why, all the land to-day is fairyland.
I came by the upland common all ablaze
With gorse from end to end, and met the breeze
Full in the face, and the grey morning clouds
Rolled northward rent, and the great sun shone
through:
But that was nothing. Where the road dips down
Steep from rough common to the wide grass-lands,
I found a world of blossom; by my side
The May-trees stood so thick with bloom, methought
No space was there for song o' the thrush, that
shook
The heart o' the bush with rhapsodies of love:
But that was nothing; for each blade of grass
Had its rain-jewel; short-lived buttercups—
Wealth of the meadow, fairy merchants' gold—

Thronged to my feet; then field and hedgerow, elms
All newly green, and golden youth of oaks,
And great horse-chestnut with imperial plumes;
Far trees, and farther in the farther fields,
Till I saw dimly the fair silver coils,
Where the full Thames lay dreaming. All the land
Was one broad flood of blossom, all the air
Was scent of blossom. Down the road I came,
Like a winged creature who but walks for whim,
Half stifled by the songs I could not sing:
But that was less than nothing; for I came
Under your garden-wall, the old red wall,
Rough stained and beautiful; and there I stood.
Delaying my delight, and looking up
I looked close in and through laburnum bloom,
And through the bloom light slanted to my eyes,
Sunshine and blossom dazzling, golden shower,
Quivering, with beauty breathless: but that's nothing,

For when I pushed your gate, my dusty feet
Were ankle-deep in daisies; nothing still,
For round the o'erflowing lilac-bush I stole
Breathless, and here are you.

M. Yes, here am I;—
And is that something?

R. Crown o' the day to me,
Music that makes all music's meaning clear,
The master-touch interpreting all lights,
Colour of colours, heart o' the living rose——

M. Enough! Enough! Would you too flatter?

R. No.
I pray you pardon me. I am mad to-day:
Drunken with spring: this morning on the road
I could not sing, for all the world was poem,
The world was poet, I was dumb; but now
Beholding you I speak I know not what,
The pent stream flows, and I am rhapsodist.
I pray you pardon me.

M. You need no pardon:

I think your liking for these things is real.
You really like the country.

R. Really like it!

To-day I love it.

M. Arthur loves the town.

R. Arthur? Where is he? Will he come to-day?

M. Yes, he is here; he's somewhere in the house—
Helping my maid perhaps to plan a gown
For the next part I play.—

R. Don't talk of plays.
Is not this better than the playhouse?

M. Yes:
Oh so much better! This is holiday,
My holiday amid the birds and bloom,
My holiday with flowers.

R. You love flowers.

M. I hate them.

R. What?

M. I hate them. So would you

If they were hurled at you, each on its wire,
Falling with a thud on the boards, stirring the dust,
Formal and scentless, dully inevitable
As gloves or fans—a bouquet!

R. Bloom is bloom.
May I not choose some flowers for my lady?

M. No, let them live; I am so modest, I,
One daisy shall suffice me; thanks, my poet.

R. Your poet! If I dared — that was my dream
The night when I first saw you; on that night
I was so full of poetry, or verse
Which would be poetry, so full of song,
That, as I walked home through the London crowd—
Crowd that was but a murmur in my ears,
A shadow world,—I heard no single word
Of Arthur's talk, who will be critical.
The moon shone fair above base yellow lights,
And my lips babbled song; the moon shone fair

And touched my lips with madness, till I thought
That I was poet, fit to be your poet:
I broke from Arthur, and ran home; my brain
Was burning; "It is the god," I cried,
"The god inspires me:" so I seized my pen
And wrote:—and by the morning light I read
Page after page of broken scribbled verse,
Poor verse—Yes, you may laugh.

M. I do not laugh.
Show me this verse.

R. Then you love poetry?

M. I hate it. Verses have been flung at me
To fall with a thud like flowers: poetry
Is but cheap flowers, jewellery that's cheap,
Cheap as my life.

R. Why will you talk like that?

M. I talk as I feel. I am not good, you know;
Not good,—and somewhat weary of my life;
At least I can be honest—bad but true,—
Show me your verse.

R. My lady, speak no more

These cruel words against yourself. You know
I can't believe them—even if I would.

M. You would believe them then?

R. I wished to once;
Once; long ago.

M. We have been friends one week.

R. I was a fool, a prejudiced poor fool,
And I knew nothing.

M. A week ago! Poor boy!

R. I am a boy no longer. As a boy
I lived with boys, and loved my friends, my dreams,
And did not hate my books; I worked and played,
Glad both of work and play. Then I saw you:
Now I see nought but you.

M. Nought but each cloud,
Each summer cloud, each tree, each blade of grass.

R. I saw all these because I came to you,
Because I came to you, all beautiful;
They had but mocked me else.

M. As they mock me.

Would I could see their beauty; for this land,
Your dainty land of spring, is laid in flats;
The carpenters are barely out of sight;
Smell o' the lamp, glare o' the gas; and soon
Not without jolt and creak the play's next scene
Will be presented. I foresee the scene.

R. What is that scene?

M. A dainty scene enough;
A Room, a bijou, boudoir, lady's bower;
A wall of satin, save where Cupids leer
From panels; two long windows draped in lace
Through which the rose-coloured pale sunlight faints
To die on flowered carpet; all things there
Which women love, for which—Let's hear your verse.

R. There are tears in your eyes.

M. No, no. My eyes are dazed
By too much lime-light. Let me hear your verse.

R. There are tears in your eyes: why do you cry?
Poor child!

M. Child! I am laughing now; are you content?

Child! I suppose that I was once a child,
Knowing no harm i' the world, a little child.
I must have been—but it was long ago.

R. Tell me about yourself.

M. With pleasure, sir;
The subject interests me: I was born
Some five-and-twenty years ago, or more—
I think that I was born before the flood:
I lived in a farm:—Now mark the pretty scene!
To Right a cottage porch o'ergrown with roses,
Right Centre—pump or pigeon-house on pole,
Then practicable gate o' the old pasture,
And Left a bit of barn-door. On this scene
Enter a young girl singing; that was I.
"Dost like the picture?" as they ask i' the play.
But come, recite! You did not tear them all,
Not all your pretty verses?

R. All, I think:
There's something I remember—but I will not,
You are so strange to-day.

M. You like me not:

You like me not to-day; and that is well;
You must not like me.

R. Stop; don't tell me that;
It is too late.

M. Poor boy!

R. Not poor but rich,
Rich with a kingdom that I would not yield
To be an Emperor.

M. And that's not much.
Don't talk like a young lover on the stage!
This is my garden, this my holiday;
Keep the stage lover from me:—Be my Siebel,
Cull me some flowers.

R. Let the flowers live;
Is not the whole world nosegay for my lady?

M. Pestilent vapours.

R. No.

M. Disperse them then;
Come, let me have my hour; come, if you love me;
Sit by my feet and speak your verse to me;
Here at my feet! That's right; and now the verses!

R. They are so weak.

M. The better! Who am I
That I should make men poets? Quires of verse
Have been discharged at me; they were all weak.
Begin!

R. I cannot.

M. If you love me, Ralph.

R. I must. I can remember but few lines.

Night's flower, child of night and perfumed air—
Star o' the night, lone star as pure as pale—
Night's bird whose mere discourse is music rare—
Bird, star and flower, lovelorn nightingale—
Lightning of wrath, O passion fierce and frail—
Heart o' the rose, O heart of love's own heart—
Air, fire, life, death—and woman too thou art.

I have obeyed you, lady.

M. Thanks, my poet.
And when I played, you saw all this in me?

R. You were so much to me.

M. And it was real?
Was this play real to you? Did you believe?

R. The woman that you played was real to me,
Now shadow of a shade, since you are real,
Since I am by your feet, and this is you.

M. Shadow of a shade, ay, shadow of shade is play
And woman too.

R. Then nought be real to me
But this dear shade.

M. No; have no faith in me.

R. I have no choice.

M. Poor boy!

R. Nay, not so poor!
Now, when I felt your hand light on my hair,
A blessing fell on me: Oh to sit here
For ever, that this moment might be time,
Dream with no waking after! dreamful sleep,
Or death of all thought save that you are near.

M. Yes, dream; you are safe in dreams—but never wake.

R. Dream, and I dream this day will ne'er be done.

M. The butterfly outlives it, but not love.

R. One night falls dark, dark night on love and life.

M. Oh this is poetry, folly, player's rant;
You dream and wake to-morrow. A week ago
We two were strangers; let some few days pass
And we are strangers.

R. But a week ago
I had not lived.

M. Stage fever is not life;
Stage fever's quick.

R. Yes, quick to cure or kill.

M. You must not talk like that.

R. What need to talk?
Let the air talk in the lilac; you and I
Sit silent breathing spring-time—you and I.

M. And are you happy?

R. I am rich with joy,
And yet not wholly happy.

M. Lover's mood!
O lover's luxury of sighs long-drawn!
Immortal—dead at sundown! Is't not sweet
To taste the day's delight, and sorrow too,
Sorrow in the thought that you and I must part?

R. Why must we part?

M. Why! Wake and see the world,
The world on which I make my player's round,
A star—how runs it?—star that's pale and pure,
Star o' the troupe, a comet with faint tail,
With somewhat musty followers—not with you.
Child, would you journey round this dusty world
Tied to my apron-string?

R. Yes, that would I.

M. No, be a man and burst these idle bonds,
These apron-strings.

R. Who tied me here but you?
You bound me, and I will not loose the bonds.
You bid me be a man; be woman you
To pity me: "I would I were thy bird."

M. Don't quote from plays.

R. 'Tis real enough to me.

M. I've seen so many love-sick Montagues;
I've stepped from windows with no house behind,
Leaned from sham balconies to lisp sham love;—
The powder's thick on the child Juliet's cheek;
She's dead i' the first scene, dead, stark, analysed,
Dissected—Now I shock you! You see now
How dull to feel I am, how cold, how bad,
How tired of life! A live warm-blooded man
Had better crash his heart against a stone
Than look for love in me. Be warned in time.
All is cold here at my heart, all is cold here.
See me, not Juliet in me: push her back,
This Juliet of your fancy, to the tomb;
To the tomb with her, if you love me, Ralph.

R. If I love!

M. Child, poor child, you must not love,
You shall not love me.

R. I am not a child,—
I love you, Mabel.

M. Hush! you shall not love me.

You will not: do you mark me? Arthur! here!
Where is my loving playmate? Ho, boy, ho!
Come to me, Arthur.

Arthur (*coming to them*). I salute you both.
Good morning, Ralph, a happy day to you!
Is it not happy, man?

M. Oh, much too happy!
I triumph, Arthur!

A. May I kiss your hand?

M. My lips if you will; I am right royal to-day.

A. (*to her*). What are you saying? You will spoil it all.

M. Look how the boy stares, boy who dares not think
Of woman's lip, who dares not lift his eye
When trembling sore he takes her finger-tips,—
Boy! child! a woman's wine is made of grapes,
Virtue! a fig's end!—oh, how runs the stuff?—
Iago knew us.

A. Good! Brava! brava!

Was ever such an actress! Ralph, applaud!
I'll swear he half believes her. What an actress!

R. (*to her*). And is this acting?

M. No. I tell you, no.
(Be silent, Arthur, do not cross my whim.)
I have been acting, acting for a week,
A long dull week, seven days of sentiment—
Heaven bless us all!—of sentiment and song,
"Sighing like furnace," of young grass and lambs,
Young grass, young lambs, young love, love of a boy.
But now good-bye, ingenuous charm of youth,
Good-bye to love, good-bye to love and lamb,
And back to town! I am free, I am true, myself,
I am myself again. Good-bye, dear boy;
We meet in town? No. Then good-bye again.

R. Good-bye.

(*Ralph goes away. Mabel will not look at him. When he is out of sight, and Mabel still stands and looks the other way, Arthur comes to her doubtfully.*)

A. What means this, Mabel? Won't you speak?

M. Go.

A. What have *I* done? I've done nothing wrong.

M. Nothing but torture me! Go!

A. Very well!
I never yet have crossed a lady's whim.

(*Arthur goes away.*)

M. I am alone: this is my holiday.

HEATHER

HEATHER.

Julius. Hi, good dog! Here! Come out of the sun, you four-legged idiot! Many years in my company, and still so little wisdom. Eh? What? "Dogs and Englishmen walk in the sun." Very true: but I am an Englishman who likes shade; you are my dog, and should like what I like. Sit here under my left arm. That is better. You are much to be pitied in that you cannot lean your back against the smooth trunk of a pine, and stretch out your legs before you. I too can lie on my stomach, if it please me, but you cannot for all your aspirations lean your back against a tree in comfort. Nor, though you cock

your ear like a critic, do you care a jot for that faint sighing overhead, which even on this stillest of summer days is sweet to hear. Nor do those bright intelligent eyes perceive the beauty of heather. See how my right arm, half sunken, lies along this tuft, which is springy as the very finest smoking-room sofa, and beautiful—yes, by the immortality of humbug! more beautiful than the last creation of the last æsthetic upholsterer! But heather is healthy, irrepressible, and vulgar; it rebounds, it asserts itself; it is vulgar, vivid, and healthy as those reapers out beyond the wood, where the sun smites the wide field golden. Heather is vulgar, and probably its colour is *voyant* to the well-ordered eye. In truth, this England has become a strange place, Aurelian, while you and I have been knocking about the world. Here lie you in the shade of the old pine-wood, and wag your tail—a smiling mongrel and an incurable Philistine. Here lie I happy in the heather, and wag my jaw — a Philistine — but

perchance to be cured and become oblivious of Ascalon. And the strange thing is that you and I were wont to value ourselves on our taste. In this very spot have we reposed side by side, as now, and been well pleased with ourselves. Were I as once I was, I should hug myself with joy of that broad corn-land, all Danae to the sun, of the blue through the dark fir-tops: I should turn an idle eye to the hard whiteness of the road away on the right, where you delayed in the glare and ran the risk of madness, and then bless myself that I could feel the entire charm of a bed of heather spread in the shade for me. But now I am beset by doubts. What if heather be vulgar? It pushes, it rebounds, it asserts itself; it is decked with purple bells. It is not a sun-flower; it does not even wish to be a sun-flower; it is not wasted by one passionate sweet desire to become a sun-flower; it seems to be content with itself—content as a thriving grocer. Has Elfrida become a sun-flower? She used to be great fun.

She was once a little girl, but now a young lady. She would not agree with the heather. Under the dark pine-trees her gown of olive hue would be but a bit of the shadow, and she unseen but for the sunshine of her hair. O sunny hair! O wheat, out in the happy field, where the reaper is singing, or ought to be! Oh—but rhapsody is out of date. Elfrida has changed, O my dog, since the days when she was Elf, and rode the old horse bare-back, and played cricket with the boys, princess and witch of the schoolroom, elf of this wood, and utter fairy! She is a beauty now, and her gowns are as the dead leaves of the forest for number and colour, and her head is a little bowed on one side as the head of the lily, and her face is a comely mystery. These are brave words, Aurelian. I improve apace. Yet there is none like her. What does she think of me? Were I a lover, thus idle in the sweet shade, I would solve the question by some pretty test, as thus: She loves me—she loves me not; she loves—no;

she—but I perceive that you do not like me to pluck hairs from your tail; and yet I have called you friend these many years. Let the question remain unanswered. Or let us be wise, and know she loves us not.

> "Sing little bird in the tree,
> But not because my love loves me,
> For she does no such thing;
> Therefore, for your good pleasure only sing."

Thank you. And now for luncheon. Now is the hour, when in eating-houses all the world over, there is clink of knives and small change, clatter of plates, and hum of talking and eating. Here there is no bustling waiter nor scent of roast joint, but only a crust of bread, an apple, and pure air. Were this my last crust you should share it. It is well, however, that you have no taste for apples. *He* would have tempted you with tea and a chop. Steady! Don't bolt your bread, and I will find a biscuit in my pocket. Be dignified, as becomes a traveller, and one who has had losses. Have I

had my losses? Have I lost something rare? I cannot say. But if I had not so longed to see the world, I might have gained something, when an Elf was tenant of this old wood. What? Enough? Why these extravagant demonstrations, this wagging of the tail, and, indeed, of the entire body? What do you see? Who is it? Elfrida! I did not think you would come out to-day.

Elfrida. Is it not beautiful?

Jul. Yes.—

"The valleys stand so thick with corn that they do laugh and sing."

Elf.—

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean—
Tears from the depth of some divine despair,
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields."

Jul. It is scarce autumn yet. Let it be summer still; and let us laugh with the valleys. Consider that broad beauty in the sun.

Elf. Is it not exquisite, pathetic?

Jul. Is it? You like it?

Elf. Oh yes.

Jul. It's not too bright, too garish?

Elf. Perhaps it is. I did not think that you would feel that.

Jul. Oh, not too bright for me. I like to sit in shadow and stare into the sun. But for you? I thought that you would resent the shining of the blue, the gleaming of the yellow corn, the cheerfulness of all things.

Elf. Are you laughing at me? I never know.

Jul. I laugh because you are here. It brings back other days. Oh, don't sigh. They were jolly, but none so jolly as this. Jolly! Let me say jocund.

Elf. I think it is all too bright. It hurts the eyes a little.

Jul. Are they weak, those eyes?

Elf. I think not.

Jul. I think not.

Elf. But I like soft colours best; don't you?

Jul. Tender grey skies, tender green grass, and tone.

Elf. Oh yes. That is good. That is like Lacave. It is only by studying the French painters that one can learn to love our grey-green English landscapes, to comprehend their infinite tenderness.

Jul. It is hard even for a French painter to comprehend the infinite.

Elf. Is it so hard? I wish you could see his pictures. I know so little, and I can't explain myself; but he is so clever, and it is all so true. I should like you to know him, Julius.

Jul. Let it be so. I don't hate a Frenchman. What does he paint?

Elf. Oh, wonderful still things, all rest and brooding calm; a level grey-green sea; long, level, level sands all grey with wan sea-water; and far-off creeping mist and low grey sky.

Jul. Always that?

Elf. Yes, I think so; but with infinite variety in the monotone.

Jul. He must have a merry heart to keep him warm, or an endless cold in the head. Is he jocund, this painter?

Elf. Oh, Julius! He is always very still.

Jul. And grey? But I will learn to like the right things. Am I too old to learn? Will you teach me?

Elf. I can't teach anything, as you know, Julius. You must ask M. Lacave.

Jul.—

> "The owl in the sunlight sat and said,
> 'I hate your vulgar blue and red;
> Oh, better the grey of a wan twilight,
> Or a black nocturne at the dead of night.'
> O M. Hibou,
> A word with you—
> Pray, how can one gain so keen a sight?"

But in sober prose, sweet coz, I will to school again, and learn to love grey weather—a taste much to be desired in this old land of ours. Only

let this day be holiday. Let us be happy to-day —happy as sunburnt reapers in the field. I give the day to vulgar joy, for I am at home again, and the hour is fair. Joy is vulgar, is it not?

Elf. Oh no. Joy is good.

Jul. Good, and sweet, and sad, and so evil.

Elf. You are mocking me again, I think. But surely it is true that joy and sorrow are very near together, are one in some sort; are for us so blended and intermingled that we can no more sever one from another than the tuberose from its scent.

Jul. I knew it. Evil is sad, and sad is sweet, and sweet is good. But no more gladness, which is scarce better than jollity. We must be sweetly, sadly, seriously joyous. It shall be so to-morrow. To-morrow I will begin to learn. To-morrow to school; to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow. But to-day! To-day I am so deeply, unutterably glad of the goodly earth, where angels might gather in the corn. Think of me as one who will do better, as one who has kept bad company for

years: do you wag your tail at me, sir? I said bad company, Aurelian; nay, pat him not Elfrida, for he is a Philistine, and must be chastened. He is happy with a bone, sorry with a beating. To-morrow will I give him a bone and a beating at the same time, thus complicate his emotions, thus begin his education. He, too, shall learn how subtly pleasure and pain are interwoven. Down, you fantastic pup!—Elfrida, this grove intoxicates me. It is not long since an Elf ran wild here, leaping in the heather, laughing to the air, darting through the shadows like a truant sunbeam fresh from heaven.

Elf. Do you remember those old days?

Jul. That is better. There is the old colour in your cheeks. Do you ever run now?

Elf. Sometimes, but not now. M. Lacave is painting me, and he likes me to be pale.

Jul. Would he were pale, very pale! You are too rare to fade, too——

Elf. Julius, what is the matter with the dog?

Jul. He has found a mare's nest. I know that air of preternatural sagacity, Lead on, Aurelian; we follow thee. Hush! Look here! Scarce ten yards from where we sat! Is not this a day of enchantment?

Elf. Hush! Poor child, how sound he sleeps.

Jul. A little tramp of Italy, and a jolly little fellow.

Elf. He has crept in here from off the hard road of life. Don't wake him, Julius.

Jul. Not I. Do you think I would mar such slumber? Look how evenly the breath stirs the torn shirt on his breast; and how easily he lies, his knees a little bent, as if he would curl himself like some soft-coated animal warm in the heather. Did an eagle let him fall?

Elf. How beautiful is the soft olive face lying on the outstretched arm! and look at the lashes —how long they are on the cheek! Poor child! The path before him must be rough for those little feet. Poor child, poor child!

Jul. Not so poor neither. Is sleep like that

worth nothing? See how he smiles, and the humorous wrinkle between the eyebrows, and the warm blood in the cheek. It is a child's cheek, round and soft; but the jaw is firm enough. Such a one moves well and cheerily among the chances of life. No fear for him. He was born in a happy hour.

Elf. How beautiful he is, astray from a poet's Italy, fragrant of the wine-press, and eloquent of most delicate music!

Jul. Yet should he wake, that rustic bagpipe would be doubtless discordant. Sleep, little one, in good sweet Northern heather; sleep, little Ampelus, out of the swinging vines. Sleep, vagrant poem—not Ampelus; for now I bethink me, Elfrida, this is the very god of love.

Elf. Poor little child of the South.

Jul. Bad grandchild of the Southern sea—lovely and capricious grandam, with malice in her smiles. Wake him not or tremble. Elves of the wood a-many have confessed his power. See how the dog trembles. Away!

Elf. Can we do nothing for him, Julius?

Jul. Nothing. But stay. There is a book of antique lore that says to those who chance to find Eros asleep, that, be they many or few, one or two, each must sing the god a song, and cross his palm with silver. I therefore in this upturned little brown hand place this half-crown. Do you take this, its fellow, and do likewise.

Elf. I shall never pay you, Julius.

Jul. I am paid with hope. So half the charm is done. Now, sit you here upon this tiny knoll. I will lie here on the other side. So our theme is between us. Do you begin the song.

Elf. (*sings*)—

Love lies asleep
Deep in the pleasant heather;
Wake him not lest ye weep
Through the long winter weather;
And sorrow bud again in spring,
With apple-blossoming,
And bloom in the garden close,
With blooming of the rose,

And ye, ere ye be old,
Die with the brief pale gold,
And when the leaves are shed,
Ye too lie dead.

Jul. No fear of waking this vagrant Love. How fast he sleeps!

Elf. What utter weariness!

Jul. What splendid health!

Jul. (*sings*)—

Oh, merry the day in the whispering wood,
Where the boy Love lies sleeping;
And clad in artistic ladyhood
An Elf her watch is keeping!
Oh, she was a queen of the elfin race,
And flower of fairy land!
The squirrel stood to look in her face,
And the wild dove came to her hand;
But her fairies have given a gift more fair
Than any that elves or ladies wear,
Unbought at any mart—
A woman's heart.

Boys and maidens passing by,
Be ye wise, and let Love lie!
There's never a word than this more wise
In all the old philosophies.
Hush your song this summer day,
Lest he wake and bid you stay;
Hush and haste away,
Haste away,
Away!

Elf. And we too must be going, for look how long the shadows of the reapers lie along the land. How sad so sweet a day must end!

Jul. And are not others coming better than this?

Elf. Who can say? Ah, yes! I will believe that they are coming.

Jul. That is wise, Elfrida. That is bravely said. Look how the sunlight comes like a conqueror, slanting through the dark firs! It touches the poor child's cheek, and you stoop to kiss the

place. That is well done. Did you see how he smiled and moved in sleep? He will wake soon with the evening light about him, to find wealth in his little brown hafid, and in his heart the dream of a young queen's kiss.

Elf. Come. It is time to go home.

Jul. And after our many journeys by land and sea, is there still a home for us? Arise, Aurelian! come, good pup, and follow our gracious lady home.

THE END.

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